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ABSTRACT

Although the Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank (ISB):High School Form has been used to distinguish between normal and abnormal adolescents, it has been hypothesized that in facility placed juvenile delinquents' highly conflictual responses (i.e., those that index maladjustment) reflect removal from home and agency placement rather than long-term maladjustment. To test this hypothesis, 24 white, court-adjudicated male adolescents completed the ISB. Following initial scoring, sentence stem responses that were a direct result of facility placement (i.e., that mentioned the facility or emphasized removal from home) were eliminated. The ISB maladjustment scores were prorated to provide a sample of comparison scores that did not include responses pertaining to placement. Results showed that the mean maladjustment score prior to the elimination of agency-related responses was 150.8 with a standard deviation of 26.0. Following elimination of the agency-related responses and prorating of the protocols, the mean maladjustment score was 131.6 with a standard deviation of 25.7. An analysis of the sentence stems most likely to elicit agency-related responses showed that these stems were those which had been found in previous research to distinguish between agency placed youths and high school controls. The findings suggest the use of the scoring procedure alone may artificially elevate scores into the maladjustment range. The usefulness of the ISB in revealing longstanding conflicts is likely to be diminished by the intrusion of conflictual responses pertaining only to removal from home and placement in a facility. (KGB)

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SCORING THE ROTTER INCOMPLETE SENTENCE BLANK-HIGH SCHOOL FORM
IN FACILITY PLACED MALE JUVENILE DELINQUENTS: MALADJUSTMENT OR
ARTIFACT OF PLACEMENT

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Finally, we are grateful to the youths who assisted in completing the protocols from which the data were derived. We wish them well.

The Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank: High School Form (Rotter and Rafferty, 1950) has been used to distinguish between normal and abnormal adolescents. Fuller, Parmelee and Carroll (1982), using the maladjustment scoring system of the ISB, were able to distinguish between a group of male juvenile delinquents placed in a state residential facility and a control group of public high school male adolescents nominated by their teachers and thought to be without learning and emotional problems. Further, by selecting items that most effectively discriminated the two groups, the authors of that study were able to re-administer a shortened version of the ISB to a different sample of juvenile delinquents and high school controls and improve the discriminative ability of the instrument.

Unfortunately, the authors do not discuss thematic content of the test protocols in their study. While "maladjustment" is postulated as the distinguishing feature being detected by the ISB, an equally plausible hypothesis would seem to be that the juvenile delinquent samples in their study were discriminable from controls via the ISB simply by virtue of having been removed from home and placed in a state facility. This study was performed to test the hypothesis that in facility placed juvenile delinquents highly conflictual responses (i.e. those that are said to index maladjustment) to ISB sentence stems reflect removal from home and agency placement more so than they do long-term maladjustment.

Method

Subjects. Subjects were 24 white court-adjudicated male adolescents who were placed in a New York State Division for Youth residential treatment center. The mean age of the boys was 15 years 6 months.

Instrumentation. The Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank-High School Form was used in this study. The test yields a simple score that is a putative measure of maladjustment. Scores range from 0 to 240, with a suggested cutoff of 135 or above indicating maladjustment. Fuller, Parmelee, and Carroll (1982), found in their study a score of 129 to be more effective in discriminating high school control adolescents from facility placed delinquents. Scores are derived by a numerical weight of 0-6 to each response made on the test. If a response is omitted, the score for that item is prorated by the formula

$$40/40 - \text{omissions.}$$

Procedure. After consent for participation in the study had been obtained from both the youths and their parents, The Incomplete Sentence Blanks were administered to the 24 adolescent delinquent subjects at the facility where they resided. The test was administered in one sitting to the youths who were seated around tables in small groups of two and three. The directions at the top of the form were read to the boys as well as an explanation of the anonymity of the results and a prohibition against the boys identifying themselves by name on the protocols. Talking during the test completion was discouraged.

Once the ISB had been completed by the youths, they were scored by the senior author and three undergraduates trained in the scoring of the instrument. The reliability between scorers averaged 91% with a range of 98-84.

Following initial scoring, sentence stem responses contained in the protocols that were a direct result of facility placement were identified and eliminated from the protocols. Such responses were defined as those which would not have been possible had the youth not been placed at the facility, i.e. that mentioned the facility or emphasized explicitly the youth's removal from home.

Following the elimination of those responses from the protocols, the ISB maladjustment scores were prorated to provide a sample of comparison ISR scores that did not include responses pertaining to placement.

Results and Discussion

The mean maladjustment score of the residential youth prior to the elimination of agency-related responses was 150.8 with a standard deviation of 26.0. There was a total of 94 agency-related responses distributed among the protocols of the 24 youths for a mean of 3.9/youth. Following elimination of agency-related responses and prorating of the protocols, the mean maladjustment score was 131.6 with a standard deviation of 25.7, a significant difference ($F(1,46)=6.67$, $p .025$) suggesting that the agency-related responses had elevated the youths' scores further into the maladjusted range.

An attempt was also made to characterize those sentence stems most likely to elicit agency-related response. Chi-square analysis indicated that this type of response was not randomly assigned, but instead was elicited by particular sentence stems, listed in Table 1 ($\chi^2(38) = 157.9, p < .01$). It is notable that these stems coincide closely with those found by Fuller, Parmelee, and Carroll to be most powerful in discriminating between agency placed youths and high school controls in their study. These stems tend to feature the youth as sentence subject and his present tense feelings as the verb (e.g. I wish..., I regret..., I hate...).

It is perhaps unsurprising that these stems distinguish between agency-placed delinquents and high school controls. To infer long-term maladjustment in the former group on the basis of an elevated score, however, seems somewhat inaccurate when that elevation is at least partially due to agency-placement itself. (This is, of course, not to say that court-adjudicated youths placed in a facility may not be maladjusted, but rather that maladjustment and agency placement are not synonymous and should not be confused).

The results of this small study would seem to have implications for the clinical use of the ISB with this difficult population. As an assessment instrument, the ISB usually counts among its advantages its economical administration both in terms of the comparative brevity of the test itself and in its usefulness in group administration. The authors could find no data on the number of clinicians who use the suggested scoring

method described by Rotter and used both by Fuller, Parmelee, and Carroll and in the present study.

It would seem, however, that most clinicians employ the ISB for its usefulness in revealing conflictual themes in the client. The present results suggest 1) the use of the scoring procedure alone may artificially elevate the youth's score into or further into the maladjustment range 2) the usefulness of the ISB (with or without the scoring system) in revealing longstanding conflicts is likely to be diminished by the unsurprising intrusion of conflictual responses pertaining only to the youth's removal from the home and placement in a facility. Ironically, this would seem to be especially true if the ISB is administered at the outset of a youth's agency placement, perhaps as part of a psychological test battery. While the charitable hope of effective case planning may be the goal of such an administration, the confused, negative, or resentful feelings likely to be present in the youth at that time and engendered by his facility placement may obscure the very issues the ISB as an assessment instrument hopes to clarify.

References

Fuller, G.B., Parmelee, W.M., and Carroll, J.L. Performance of delinquent and nondelinquent high school boys on the Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank. Journal of Personality Assessment 46(5), 506-510.

Rotter, J.B. and Rafferty, J.E. Manual: The Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank: College Form. New York: Psychological Corporation, 1950.

Table 1

Sentence Stems Eliciting Agency-Related Responses
(In decreasing order of frequency)

Stem	# of Responses (24 possible)
34. I wish....	14
5. I regret...	9
15. I can't...	8
39. My greatest worry is...	7
3. I want to know...	6
30. I hate...	6
25. I need...	5
9. What annoys me...	4
2. The happiest time...	4
37. I...	4
12. I feel...	3
28. Sometimes...	3
36. I secretly...	3